

VZCZCXRO0474
PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0186/01 3430453
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 080453Z DEC 08
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0915
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0992

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000186

SIPDIS

CA/OCS/ACS/AF (ELIZABETH GRACON)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TH](#)

SUBJECT: 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION VOTING OUTREACH SUMMARY REPORT

CHIANG MAI 00000186 001.2 OF 002

Summary and Comment

¶1. Post assisted an estimated 200 voters to register as absentee voters and several hundred more with other voting inquiries during the 2008 election cycle. Through voter registration open houses, cooperation with political party groups, and an advertising campaign throughout northern Thailand, post was able to reach out to the sizeable and growing American citizen population of northern Thailand, which we currently estimate at 7,000.

¶2. Comment: By tracking this year's voters who sought assistance at post, we learned that Amcits residing permanently in northern Thailand rely more heavily on post's voting assistance program versus tourists who are in Thailand temporarily over Election Day. In addition, post discovered that outreach programs away from the Consulate were more successful because they were convenient for Amcit voters. End comment and summary.

Voter Trends

¶3. Post assisted an estimated 200 voters with registering as absentee voters using the Federal Post Card Application during the 2008 election cycle. Post assisted several hundred more Amcits with general inquiries about voting overseas, many of which had already registered as absentee voters or who were worried about receiving their official ballot on time.

¶4. Post devoted significant time to assisting retired Amcits, a large fraction of the northern Thailand Amcit community, to register and vote absentee. Many of these retired Amcits have not voted for several years but told post that this year's election was particularly important to them. Post assisted a small number of first-time voters, who were in Thailand as tourists. Most voters who were in Thailand temporarily as tourists or business travelers during Election Day had already registered to vote absentee from the U.S. or had selected early voting options, if they were available.

Outreach Initiatives

¶5. Post conducted a series of nine "Voting Open Houses" from May to October 2008 to assist Amcits registering to vote overseas. The purpose of the open houses was to assist Amcits more efficiently allowing them to go directly to cons staff with voting inquiries without waiting in the normal ACS queue. Post hosted the first six of these open houses in the waiting area of the Consular Section and the last three at a local expat

supermarket. On average, each open house assisted about ten Amcits with voter registration, totaling about 90 to 100 Amcits over the course of the nine open houses.

¶16. A second way that post conducted voter outreach was through cooperation with local businesses and the Democrats and Republicans Abroad groups. Post liaised with local grocery stores and restaurants with large Amcit clienteles to advertise outreach activities and general guidance on overseas voting. Post invited both Democrats and Republicans Abroad to host voter registration tables at the American community Independence Day picnic. Both parties accepted the invitation and assisted in registering over 100 Amcits during the event. (Note: Post briefed both political party groups on campaign restrictions and voting assistance regulations prior to the event.)

¶17. Finally, during a Consular Roadshow to Chiang Rai from October 29-30, cons staff assisted a small number of Amcits living and working in that province, which is about a three-hour drive from the Consulate in Chiang Mai. Although cons staff provided a variety of services, such as notaries and passport applications, most Amcits had voting inquiries. (Comment: For future consular roadshows during election years, post might consider dates further in advance of Election Day.)

Media Coverage

¶18. There has been limited media coverage of post's voting out-reach activities this year. Local Chiang Rai press reported on the October 29-30 Consular roadshow, pointing out that Amcits residing in Chiang Rai could see advice from the visiting cons staff on voter registration and absentee voting. Also, local expat newspapers and newsletters, such as the Chiang Mai Mail, reported occasionally on outreach activities, such as those at the local expat supermarket.

CHIANG MAI 00000186 002.2 OF 002

Lessons Learned and Ideas for the Future

¶19. Based on feedback from Amcits, post learned that outreach conducted off Consulate grounds was more convenient. One Amcit reported that he found the supermarket open houses more efficient because there was ample parking and no security check. In the future, post will conduct a greater number of off-compound outreach programs.

¶10. Another consideration for future voter outreach programs would be greater attention outside of the Chiang Mai area. Voters had very positive feedback about the Consular Roadshow in Chiang Rai as an efficient way for them to ask their voting-related questions. Post might consider more voting outreach programs outside of Chiang Mai to other, more remote areas of the north with large Amcit populations, such as Mae Hong Son province.
MORROW